

Yakkha language

Yakkha (also erroneously spelled as **Yakha**) is a language spoken in parts of Nepal, Darjeeling district and Sikkim. The Yakkha-speaking villages are located to the East of the Arun river, in the southern part of the Sankhuwasabha district and in the northern part of the Dhankuta district of Nepal. About 14,000 people still speak the language, out of 17,003 ethnic Yakkha in Nepal.^[4] Genealogically, Yakkha belongs to the Eastern Kiranti languages and is in one subgroup with several Limbu languages, e.g. Belhare, Athpare, Chintang and Chulung. Ethnically however, the Yakkha people perceive themselves as distinct from the other Kiranti groups such as Limbu.^{[5][6]}

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Geographical distribution

Mugali is spoken between Mugakhola and Sinuwakhola on the eastern banks of the Arun River in Dhankuta District, Province No. 1, Nepal, in the villages (VDC's) of Muga, Pakhribas, and Phalate.^[2]

Phangduwali is spoken above the Mugakhola headwaters in Pakhribas VDC, Dhankuta District, Province No. 1, Nepal.

Lumba-Yakkha is spoken in Arkhaule Jitpur and Marek Katahare VDC's, northern Dhankuta District, Province No. 1, Nepal.

Phonology

Yakkha	
Region	Nepal, Sikkim
Native speakers	20,000 (2011 census) ^[2]
Language family	Sino-Tibetan - Kiranti - Eastern - Greater Yakkha Yakkha
Writing system	Devanagari
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	ybh – inclusive code Individual codes: lmh – Lambichhong (duplicate code) phw – Phangduwali (duplicate code) luu – Lumba-Yakkha (duplicate code)^[1]
Glottolog	yakk1236 (http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/yakk1236) ^[3]

Vowels

Yakkha has the five vowels [a], [e], [i], [o], [u]. There are no centralized vowels as in other Kiranti languages. Variation between short and long vowels is possible, but this is not a phonemic contrast, because no minimal pairs can be found. Diphthongs such as [oɪ̯], [uɪ̯], [aɪ̯] can be found in some words such as *uimalaŋ* "steep descent", or the interjection *hoi* ʔ "Enough!".



The location of the Yakkha language in Kiranti and Nepal

Consonants

The consonants are shown in the table below. The voiced consonants in brackets have doubtful status. They are not phonemes, because no minimal pairs can be established. But they are also not motivated by a phonological rule. Furthermore, the voiced consonants occur only in a few words, and some of them are Nepali loans. Examples with initial voiced consonants are *gogoba* (an insect/worm), *ghak* "all", *jeppa* "really", *ɕaŋgak* "stick".



Map of the Yakkha region

		<u>Labial</u>	<u>Alveolar</u>	<u>Postalveolar</u>	<u>Retroflex</u>	<u>Palatal</u>	<u>Velar</u>	<u>Glottal</u>
<u>Plosive</u>	unaspirated	p (b)	t (d)		ʈ (ɖ)		k (g)	ʔ
	aspirated	p ^h (b ^h)	t ^h (d ^h)		ʈ ^h (ɖ ^h)		k ^h (g ^h)	
<u>Affricate</u>	unaspirated		ts	(dʒ)				
	aspirated		ts ^h					
<u>Fricative</u>			s					h
<u>Nasal</u>		m	n				ŋ	
<u>Approximant</u>	unaspirated	w				j		
	aspirated	w ^h						
<u>Trill</u>			r					
<u>Lateral</u>			l					

Notes:

- A typical feature of Eastern Kiranti languages is the merger of voiced and voiceless obstruents, and also Yakkha exhibits this feature. Voicing occurs however optionally between vowels and after nasals. Unaspirated obstruents undergo this voicing rule more regularly than aspirated obstruents. Voiced consonants that are not motivated by a phonological rule exist, but they are rare.
- Another feature of the Yakkha sound system is the change of proto */r/ and */R/ to /y/, e.g. the word for salt is *yum* in Yakkha, but *rum* in Puma (Central Kiranti), and *rɛ̃m* in Dumi (Western Kiranti).

- The rhotic [r] is not found word-initially, but in [Cr] clusters and in intervocalic position, as in *makhruna* "black" and *tarokma* "start".
- Several morphophonological processes operate in Yakkha, so that the underlying forms are not easy to establish. Many of these processes have to do with substitution by a nasal, e.g. in compound verbs like *suncama* "itch", the underlying verb stems are /sut/ and /ca/. To take an example from inflection, the verb *sapthakma* "like" is inflected *sapthamecuna* "they (dual) like him". Other examples of morphophonological processes are the change of underlying *et-se* to [esse] (meaning "in order to hunt fish").
- Underspecified Nasal prefixes assimilate in the place of articulation to the stem-initial consonant, e.g. *m-bar* "your-house", but *n-chem* "your-song".

"aka"my

Morphology

Yakkha has rich nominal and verbal morphology. Nouns inflect for case and number. Verbs inflect for person, number (singular, dual, plural/nonsingular), negation, several categories in the domain of tense, aspect and mood. In transitive verbs, both actor and undergoer are coreferenced on the verb. The category of inclusive/exclusive is found in the verbal morphology and in the possessive pronouns and prefixes.

Pronouns

Yakkha pronouns distinguish between singular, dual and plural number, and the possessive pronouns additionally distinguish between the inclusion and the exclusion of the addressee. The third person only has singular and nonsingular forms. The possessive pronouns have developed from the personal pronouns and the genitive marker *-ka*. The possessive prefixes obviously are grammaticalised possessive pronouns. They can be used instead of the possessive pronouns, e.g. one could say *akka paŋ* or *a-paŋ*, both meaning "my house". Sounds represented by /N/ in the table are underspecified nasals.

		<u>Personal pronoun</u>	<u>Possessive pronoun</u>	<u>Possessive prefix</u>
1st person	singular	<i>ka</i>	<i>akka</i>	<i>a-</i>
	dual, excl	<i>kanciŋ</i>	<i>anciŋga</i>	<i>anciŋ-</i>
	dual, incl	<i>kanciŋ</i>	<i>enciŋga</i>	<i>enciŋ-</i>
	plural, excl	<i>kaniŋ</i>	<i>aniŋga</i>	<i>aniŋ-</i>
	plural, incl	<i>kaniŋ</i>	<i>eŋga</i>	<i>eN-</i>
2nd person	singular	<i>nda</i>	<i>ŋga</i>	<i>N-</i>
	dual	<i>njiŋda</i>	<i>njiŋga</i>	<i>njiŋ-</i>
	plural	<i>nniŋda</i>	<i>nniŋga</i>	<i>nniŋ-</i>
3rd person	singular	<i>uŋ</i>	<i>ukka</i>	<i>u-</i>
	nonsingular	<i>uŋci</i>	<i>uŋciga</i>	<i>uŋci-</i>

Interrogatives and indefinite reference

Yakkha has the following interrogative pronouns and other interrogatives: *isa* "who", *i/ina* "what", *iya* "what" (if many items or uncountables are asked for), *hetna* "which", *imin* "how", *ijaŋ* "why", *hetne* "where", *hetniŋ* "when". If a certain item is asked for, *ina* will be used, but if an event is in question, the root

i occurs without further morphology, e.g. *i lekṣa?* "What happened?". Reduplication of the pronouns may result in indefinite reference, e.g. *hetniṅ hetniṅ* "some time".

Case system

Yakkha distinguishes the unmarked absolute case, the ergative *-ṇa*, the genitive *-ka/-ga*, the locative *-pe/-be*, the ablative case *-bhaṅ* and the comitative case *-nuṅ*, and the instrumental case *-ṇa*.

- The absolute marks subjects of intransitive verbs and objects of transitive verbs. In some verb classes (in the sense of valency classes), objects are marked with a locative or an instrumental. The ergative marks the agents of transitive verbs except for first and second person pronouns, which are in the unmarked nominative. Examples for absolute and ergative case (overt arguments are often omitted in natural discourse, but the examples contain them to illustrate the case):

ka khemeṇṇa "I go"

uṅ-ṇa uṅ tundwana "he understands him"

- As in many other Kiranti languages, there is an ergative-instrumental syncretism, as both cases are marked by *-ṇa*. The instrumental is used to mark instruments in a broad sense, and also for temporal reference:

luṅkhwak-ṇa "with/by means of a stone" (stone-INS)

khiṅ-bela ?-ṇa "thesedays" (this-time-INS)

- The genitive, marked by *-ka/-ga* marks the possessed item in possessive constructions, and materials:

ak-ka niṅ "my name" (I-GEN (prefix-)name)

siṅ-ga saṅghoṅ "wooden stool" (wood-GEN stool)

- The locative marks locations and goals of movement and transfer:

khorek-pe cuwa "(There is) beer in a/the bowl." (bowl-LOC beer)

- The comitative marks the accompaniment by someone or something. Also adverbials and adverbial clauses can be built with the comitative.

nda-nuṅ "with you"

suha-nuṅ "sour" (in adverbial use, e.g. taste sour)

Verbal morphology

- The verbal morphology is very complex, which is a typical feature of Kiranti languages. The outline given here necessarily provides a simplified picture. The verbal morphology is predominantly represented by suffixes, but one prefix slot exists, that is filled with an underspecified nasal that codes either third person plural or negation.
- Person and number of both actor and undergoer are indicated on the verb, and these affixes may differ according to the semantic role of their referent. For instance, the suffix *-ka/-ga*

codes second person ("you"), regardless of the semantic role, while the suffix *-m* codes only (first and second person) agents, and the suffix *-u* only codes third person undergoer. There are syncretisms, for instance the already mentioned suffix *-m*, that stands for both agreement with first and second person plural (agent). Some relations are coded by a portmanteau morpheme, e.g. the first person acting on the second is coded by '-nen' (i.e. "I understand/call/kiss etc. YOU"), supplemented by number suffixes if necessary.

- Another feature typical for Kiranti verbal morphology is the copying of nasals into syllable codas in the suffix string of a finite verb. For instance, the negated form of *tum-me-ŋ-c-u-ŋ-ci-ŋa* "we (dual, excl) understand them" is *n-dum-me-n-c-u-n-ci-ŋa-n-na*, where the negation marker *-n* is copied several times.
- As for tense, the nonpast is overtly marked by *-me?* or *-wa*. Both suffixes have their origin in grammaticalized lexical verbs ("do" and "be/exist" respectively). They occupy different slots in the verbal suffix template. The past is marked by the suffix *-a*, which is often elided to avoid hiatus in underlying vowel sequences. The perfect tense is built by the addition of the suffixes *-ma* or *-uks* to the past morpheme, and the past perfect tense is built by further addition of the suffix *-sa* to this suffix string.
- As for mood, the imperative is also coded by the suffix *-a*, e.g. *ab-a* "Come!" In transitive verbs with a third person patient, the overt suffix is *-u*, and the imperative suffix is not overtly realised. The subjunctive mood has no dedicated marker, it is marked precisely by the absence of anything but the agreement morphology, e.g. *ciya hops-u-m?* "Shall we have tea?" (tea sip-3P-1A). The subjunctive mood also expresses warnings, suggestions and potential situations in some subordinate clause types.

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External links

- [ELAR archive of Documentation and grammatical description of Yakkha, Nepal](http://elar.soa.s.ac.uk/deposit/0293) (<http://elar.soa.s.ac.uk/deposit/0293>)
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